No. 95

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Good heavens, this won't do!" she whispered. "Oh, this life! How will I get out of it? How will it end?"

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REEVES, the detective, was telling Graham Ericsen of his failure to find Fenwick implicated in the murder of his uncle. He continued by saying: "In my next inquiries I might beat up against something to set me again on the Fenwick track—very likely if I find a woman did buy the drug."

"And if that fails," said Ericsen, "I must give up. The expense will be beyond me, and an expense with no probable result."

"In that case," said Reeves, "I mean of failure, it would only add another to the list of undiscovered murderers."

Chapter 318

DROPPING HER MASK

DURING all this time, while Reeves was pursuing the suggested theory about Harry Fenwick, things had not been going smoothly in the Ericsen house. The frequent informal gatherings had of necessity been dropped on Alice's account and it did not seem easy to renew them.

Ericsen more than once made a suggestion on the subject, but Alice did not take it up. She quite agreed with him, but somehow action hung fire.

Her illness had apparently made a break, and nothing flowed back to its usual channel.

The easy-going way of the house seemed crystallizing into formality; people did not drop in as of old—they waited to be asked.

Graham complained of this.

"But we are going into society now," said Alice, with a pretty smile, "and regularly receiving; of course we can't be quite so informal. People are not sure of finding us, for one thing. I have my afternoon."

"It isn't that," said Graham.

He was continually asking about what had become of So-and-So—and So-and-So was always an old friend or a particular friend. Even Marjorie came less often.

Graham had a fretted, fettered feeling. And there was another disappointment, the deepest of all — the child, born of love, stood, as it were, between father and mother, and slowly forced them apart.

She was delicate—one of those frail children who wring the hearts that love them best.

Graham, instinctively feeling his foothold slipping from him, flung on his child a passionate love; he worried over her, lavished on her endless petting, and held her the dearer, because she made him suffer.

Alice did not believe in the delicacy; at first she smiled, slightly superior—"what did men know of young children?" Then, "she didn't believe in spoiling children."

She herself never petted Lilian, and as the child grew older she scarcely cared to go to her mother.

Then Alice got pettish—

"You fuss if that child can't sleep, but you won't believe in my bad nerves."

And this was true, for Graham had come to see

what Marjorie had seen from the first—that Alice was always well enough to go anywhere with him, and had "nerves" when it was impossible or undesirable she should go, and she wanted to keep him at her side.

That earlier submission of Graham's was a thing of the past, however.

Alice was proud of Lilian's fragile beauty and precociousness; she dressed her with perfect taste; she showed her off to visitors; but it was Graham who sat up the night with the little sufferer; who would carry her up and down for hours; who had all manner of devices for soothing her fretfulness.

The first time of this happening—this taking by him of the mother's place—was burnt into the man's soul.

He had just gone upstairs one night, Alice was already asleep, looking, as always, like the loveliest picture.

There came a tap at the dressing-room door. Ericsen opened it and found the maid, now Lillian's nurse, as well as maid, standing outside. She began a little hurriedly:

"I saw the light under your door, sir, and thought my mistress might be asleep. Can she come to Miss Lilian, please, sir?"

"What's the matter?" said Ericsen, anxiously.

"She seems crying, and unwell, sir, and I can't do anything with her."

"I'll send your mistress up. Go back, and she'll come directly."

He turned away and went up to the bedside of Alice.

The beauty of the sleeping face, the unruffled calm almost startled him.

She did not stir at his light touch on her shoulder

—he was, in fact, loth to rouse her, but, though he already knew she was not intensely fond of Lilian she was the only proper person to go to the child.

"Alice!" he said softly. She half awoke.

"What's the matter?" she murmured, crossly. "Do let me alone."

"I'm sorry to wake you, but the nurse has just been to ask you to go to Lillian—the child isn't well."

Alice swept her hair from her eyes, and opened them wide up into her husband's face.

"It's always Lilian!" she said, more crossly than before. "There's nothing the matter — waking me up like that!"

"You're half asleep, Alice," he said. "Come, get up. I'll fetch your dressing-gown."

"Do let me alone—go yourself—tiresome little thing!" said Alice, turning from him and throwing herself into another graceful attitude.

Staggered, Graham said through his teeth: "What use am I with a baby like that!"

But Alice had already sunk into serene slumber.

That was the first of his ministrations to the helpless child, and he began them with his heart on fire, and feeling more helpless that the baby in his arms.

But the nurse was efficient, and secretly delighted that her master had come instead of her mistress.

Her little charge at last slept peacefully.

Alice at breakfast the next morning made no allusion to last night. She looked fresh and beautiful after her good night and her morning toilette.

Graham hated himself for the bitter thought that so much of the beauty was surface.

He let her have her breakfast in peace, but when she had finished said, with an odd sort of a smile:

"You don't look after Lilian, Alice."

Her dark eyes dilated.

"What!" she said.

"Don't you remember my waking you?"

If he could have absolute faith in her truthfulness. If he hadn't got that fatal habit of questioning most of what she said and did.

He leaned his arms on the table, and said in a deliberate way:

"I should like you to tell me why you wouldn't go to the child. I think you remember."

She sat with her full eyelids drooping, then, lifting them with a winsome smile:

"You are the baby-worshipper!" she said.

"Ah! so you have told me before; but worship is not service, and I want a serious answer!"

"Why, you're not angry, surely!"

"Certainly not. I should be glad to know, however, whether you are or not interested to hear what was the matter after all."

"You see, you fuss so about Lilian — one must always take a nought off your fears about her, besides the child must have exercise for its lungs," said Alice, with another of those pretty, carefully designed smiles that he disliked — for whereas he had once seen only the prettiness, now he saw also the design.

"Does the nurse also unduly fuss?" he said, coldly; "it was she who was anxious in the first place. You don't want your servant to outstrip you, do you? Nor to wonder why you did not come yourself?"

"You are angry with me, Graham—at any rate, you are scolding me" — her lip quivered "You forget how often I sleep badly; last night I dropped off so soon, and if I had thoroughly roused up I shouldn't have slept again."

He was silent a minute, then, with a somewhat

bitter accent, he said:

"So you count the cost of your child's needs!"

The sarcasm was rather thrown away upon her, but she understood there was blame in it, and flashed into temper.

"I'm not going to be a slave to that child," she said, "and give up everything for her. I'm not strong enough to stand nursing a delicate child——"

"It is to be hoped," said Ericsen, "I shall never stand in need of your care, for evidently I should get scant mercy."

"Ah! you!" murmured Alice, with an utter change of face and tone to a passionate softness.

Ericsen got up abruptly, with a slight shudder.

"Lilian is my child," he said. "How can you love me without loving her?"

"I do love her, of course," said Alice, bewildered, and assuming indignation. "I'm reasonable, that's all; I don't imagine every bit of fretfulness is an ailment. How would you like to be picked up and jostled about and have people sing in your ear, when you wanted a bit of exercise. Besides, I wasn't thoroughly awake—you didn't give me time.

"She is all right this morning, of course" to all of which Graham listened without comment, and quite gravely.

He understood why she came down from indignation to expostulation—she wanted to hold him still.

Other remonstrances he made as time went on were not so restrained, and left deeper traces.

Sometimes she said nothing, only gnawed her red lip.

But when he found Lilian suffered by his advocacy of her claims he dropped them, and the breach between him and Alice grew very wide.

Meanwhile Reeves had been pursuing his new line of inquiry, but his other engagements would not allow him to occupy al his time with the Ericsen case; and it was Graham's special wish that a subordinate should not be employed.

It was, therefore, some months after the information about Harry Fenwick had been gained that Reeves sent a line to Ericsen, saying he thought he had come on a clue.

Alice asked to see the letter.

"How deliciously vague!" she said, looking annoyed. "What clue? Why doesn't he follow us Fenwick?"

"We don't think that is any use."

"Is this any use?"

"It may be."

"I can see none, save to harrass every one concerned—and I have got to go out to-night. Why don't you tell Reeves to be more explicit?"

"My dear Alice, will you eat your luncheon and allow me to manage this?" said Ericsen, smiling.

She pouted, but applied herself to her plate.

Rare thing for Alice, she had to-day an appetite, and, as soon as luncheon was over, said she would go and lie down to be ready for to-night—she had slept very badly.

She shut herself in her dressing room, and sat down before the glass, leaning forward, and examining herself critically.

Her lovely color had faded, a faint line was marked down between the large eyes, even her lips had whitened.

"Good heavens! this won't do!" she whispered. "I must sleep — anyhow — by any means! Oh! this life! How shall I get out of it? How will it end? It's only

my beauty that keeps him at all — it's that child he loves —that hateful child! Yes! what is it?"

She sprang up.

The nurse opened the door.

"I thought your bell rang, ma'am——"

"No," said Alice, "but you may as well help me dress — I am going out."

"Miss Lilian is with me, ma'am. Shall I take her upstairs first?"

"Oh, no; she can come in. Well, Lilian?"

She had not seen her little daughter that morning. Lilian went up to her shyly, and put up her face to be kissed.

Alice took no notice, but told the nurse what to bring her.

Lilian stood gravely surveying her beautiful mother, perhaps in her small mind confronted by the same problem that perplexed her father—how so soulless a body could be so perfect.

Alice turning unexpectedly, half stumbled over the child.

Up went the white hand with a violent push, almost a blow that sent Lilian reeling against a small table.

"Tiresome little wretch!" said Alice, with the child's cry in her ears as she swept downstairs.

The nurse sprang forward, and caught up the child, who, after the first short cry, stood mute, holding a tiny hand to her head.

"Of all the fiends!" muttered the angry girl; "if it were not for him and this blessed darling, I'd go this very minute!"

She hushed the child, and carried her up to the nursery.

She could find only a bruise, which she knew how to treat, but she watched Lilian carefully.

She did not want to tell her master—she could not lie to him, and if he knew what had caused the bruise there was no saying what might happen.

The child might feel no ill effects—better wait and see.

But Lilian had too much soul for her frail little body — it suffered, and the body suffered, too. She drooped and pined.

The nurse in despair went to look for her master —he was out. The girl heard her mistress come in, shut her dressing-room door, and lock it.

"The sight of her would kill the child," said the girl, indignantly. "He's sure to come up before he goes in to tea; perhaps I can put him off."

In that luxurious dressing-room Alice removed her hat and mantle, and opened a small bottle containing fluid.

Some of this she put in a glass, drank it, then lay down on the couch with a sigh of relief.

Near six Ericsen came in, and, following his usual habit, went straight up to the nursery to say good night to Lilian, or, if she were well enough, have a romp with her.

The minute he caught sight of the child sitting forlornly in the nurse's lap, he said:

"What's the matter with her?"

"I—I don't know, sir," said the girl, confusedly, as she rose; "she has been wanting you."

Ericsen sat down and took the child on his knee. The poor fellow was tremblingly alive to every change in her.

The very way she nestled to him made him afraid. She scarcely smiled at his soft words, and did not answer his caresses.

Her only movement was to keep putting her hand

to her head, and then nod when her father asked her if it ached, for she understood more than she could say.

"She has had a bit of a fall, sir, and bruised her head," said the nurse, hastily. "She will be all right after a night's rest. I'll put her to bed at once."

Now a fall was likely, though Lilian was not a child who tumbled about much; but the nurse was an extremely honest girl, and would have told her master the full particulars at once, whether she herself was in fault or whether she was not.

And her manner was flurried; Ericsen thought of, and noticed all this.

"A fall?" he said. "Where? How?" Lilian meanwhile resisting the nurse's attempt to take her.

"Let her alone. You are not hiding something, are you?"

The straight question, the straight searching look took the girl aback and, in her confusion, she stammered:

"Well, sir, I think it was an accident—she didn't mean it——"

"Who?" said Ericsen, quickly.

"My mistress, sir—she didn't know the child was behind her, and she gave her a little push, and Miss Lilian knocked her head against a table as she fell down."

His face was down on the child's head.

The nurse could not see it, but she felt his silence, felt she was only half believed.

Ericsen could not show his doubt in words; he could not question the servant about the mistress's doings; but also he could not, in the shock of the moment, bring himself to speak quietly, or to accept the explanation.

In the midst of the painful silence a bell sounded loudly.

"Is that your mistress's bell?" said Ericsen, lifting his head quickly.

"Yes, sir; she came in some time ago."

"You had better answer it; I'll wait here till your return."

The nurse went rather reluctantly. Her story was a likely one, but Ericsen knew it wasn't the true one.

The girl, generously, had betrayed herself, and the child betrayed her mother. It wasn't only "a bit of a fall," springing from a mere accident, that had made the child seem half paralyzed; some shock, of terror, of wounded feeling, had passed over her.

The man did not know what passion surged strongest within him — whether shame or anger or despair.

There always seems to lie so much more beneath Alice's slightest actions. The break-up of a life loomed before him, as he sat here lulling his darling to sleep.

The dreams of life-long happiness that had been his a few short months before were shattered, and all was dark ahead.

Chapter 319

LILIAN

THE NURSE came back after some little time; her mistress had wished to be dressed for dinner, she said in explanation. Ericsen told her to put Lilian ,who was now asleep, to bed—he would return presently. Then he left the nursery.

He must have his say with Alice whatever happened, and he went straight to her dressing-room.

She was standing before the mirror in the lovely dress she was to wear at the reception that evening, her white fingers putting the finishing touch to the hair on her forehead.

"Oh, there you are," she said, as Ericsen came in.

But instead of the usual glad light in her eyes there came a furtive look; she did not claim a kiss, she continued arranging her hair.

The remark did not need an answer, and Ericsen made none, but stood on the hearth watching her, and waiting with the patience of a strong purpose.

She turned at last.

"Why, you are not dressed!" she said; "it is past seven."

"I am not going to the reception, and I'm not sure of being at dinner," said Ericsen, briefly.

"Not going to the reception? Oh, how horrid! Why not?"

"Lilian is ill."

"That's a reason for disappointing me, I suppose," said she sharply.

Several things contributed to this mistaken tone

of hers. She was partly frightened, she was angry that a bit of unbridled temper had led to her disappointment, and her nerves were excited.

The drug she had taken, for the first time, to induce sleep, had perhaps not been taken in sufficient quantity; it had only partial effect, and had left her somewhat unstrung.

Ericsen noticed as she faced him fully the glitter of her eyes, but of course he never thought of a drug.

"A quite sufficient reason," he said; "and if, after what I have told you, you go yourself, you must do as you please. Why I come to you now is to ask for the truth about this fall of Lilian's."

"What fall?" said she, irritably. "I don't remember every single thing about that child as you do. The whole house is upset for her——"

Ericsen made a step towards her, took her hand, and drew her forward.

"I want none of that," he said sternly; "I have heard, from time to time, quite enough of it. I understand it is only a put-off. The nurse tells me you pushed the child accidentally; but I can see she is not speaking the truth. I want to know what really happened."

There had been, unhappily, enough of difference between them since Lilian's birth to make Alice understand that she could not play with him when he was in such moods.

The continual strain of seeing him drifting away from her, the consuming fever of jealousy of Lilian, of Marjorie, of everything or person he cared for, had told on her, and she was not as much the mistress of her own moods as she had been.

She flashed out:

"I will not be put aside for her! You are tired of me. I told you long ago you would be! She has come

between us——"

"God knows she has!" said Ericsen; "but it is not her fault, nor mine. And that has nothing to do with my present demand. Be frank for once, Alice."

"So you listen to servants!" she said scornfully.

"That is precisely what I have not done. I ask you again, what did you do to the child, and I intend to have an answer—and the true one."

She glanced up under her lashes at the man's set face.

Couldn't she conquer him once more, add one more to her many triumphs?

She answered the question herself by pulling her hand away and saying, with an effort at carelessness—

"She got in my way. I didn't know she was behind me, and I suppose I was irritated. I gave her a push without thinking."

"Is that the truth, Alice?"

"Would you have asked that question a year ago, Graham?"

She was fighting for all she had, for—dull as some of her instincts were — she felt that in this interview more was at stake than how she had treated Lilian.

Certainly she made her fight well, facing Graham with accusing eyes and superb dignity of manner. In a way he could not but admire her, but he was not a bit touched.

"A year ago," he said, "I had not learned to detect in you a thousand falsities. Your story does not account for Lilian's condition; she has had some shock —and a great one."

"And you think," demanded Alice indignantly, "that I could be cruel to her? Is that how you love me? Ah! we were happy before that child came to drag you from me and usurp my place!"

"Haven't you found out yet," said Ericsen, moving nearer to her, "that there are times when I can't be played with? Neither you nor I leave this room till I know the exact truth."

She stopped to arrange a fold of her gown. Ericsen waited.

"I told you I pushed her," she said. "I was worried—I may have been rougher than I knew. Of course I didn't mean to hurt her."

"In plain words, you struck her!" said Ericsen through his teeth.

"No, Graham"—she caught her breath now—"it wasn't a blow. Don't be so hard on me!"

"It comes to the same. You never have had any mercy on her from the hour she was born. But, by Heaven! if you touch her again, I shall be merciless!"

Just for a second while he spoke her face seemed to be transformed, as if an alien devil soul had sat in the place of hers.

Scarcely had Ericsen caught the change than it had gone; a strange coldness crept round his heart; his lips closed tensely.

Alice flung herself to her knees.

"Don't leave me!" she said wildly; "you'll kill me! I can't live without you! You'll never know how I have loved you! Don't leave me for her! I was maddened—I suffered——"

"Love me!" said Ericsen, with a bitter laugh. "Come, don't let us make a tragedy—we are in real life, not in a play!"

She started up and threw herself on the sofa, crushing ruthlessly her flowers and laces. She was quivering from head to foot.

"You have no pity!" she moaned. And then she clenched her hands as if she were beside herself, and

said fiercely—"I hate her! I shall always hat eher! And I shall hate you, too!"

Ericsen recoiled—even her cruelty to Lilian had left him unprepared for the sort of savagery in these terrible words.

He had not seen the blow either, and there was no doubt that it had been given in a temper; but he saw her as she was now, and heard her words.

They did not seem hers at all; they had scarcely ceased before they became like an impossible dream.

"Don't talk so foolishly," he said sternly; "you are always telling me you are so reasonable, but this is the merest nonsense! I have another word to say."

"I won't touch her again!" she whispered. "It was that you—you maddened me!"

"I did! When I last saw you we spoke about other matters altogether."

She lifted her face with that veiled look of watchfulness she had worn before once or twice, but which he had not noticed. He noticed it now.

"What do you mean?" he said. "I have said or done nothing to-day to hurt you, and if I had, what excuse would that make for violence to a child—a delicate child, and your own? Do you understand, Alice that I won't have you lay a hand on her? You can't be trusted with her."

She hid her face again.

Ericsen went to the door and opened it. A cry from her made him turn sharply.

"Graham! where are you going? To Lilian, away from me?"

He did not answer.

Alice sprang up as the door closed behind him. She broke into a laugh, and beyan tearing off her dress.

"I can be proud, too!" she said to herself. "I shall

go out tō-night, but not in this dress—it is ruined! It's his doing! He breaks my heart, but he shall not know it! Ah! but to lose his love!"

Her hands fell to her side; she looked around her hopelessly, and shuddered. "All I have—all I want! I can't be proud! I can only crawl to his feet and lie there till he pities and loves me!"

She tossed aside the soiled and torn dress, and with trembling hands put on the gown she had worn during the day.

Her dark hair clustered over her head in confusion, but she forgot to arrange it.

She opened the door and listened. The nursery was on the same floor, and not a sound came from it.

She crept up to it, turned the handle slowly and cautiously and stole into the room.

Lilian was lying in her father's arms as he sat by the hearth. No one else was there, and did not think of her, and the moans did not pierce her heart.

Her eyes went to the man. Suddenly Lilian lifted her head, caught sight of the dark figure, and clung frantically to her father with a stifled cry.

Alice retreated hurriedly; she had gone when Ericsen looked around to see what had frightened poor little Lilian.

The whole house knew that something was decidedly wrong.

Dr. Hall came, and Mrs. Ericsen did not go upstairs with him, but saw him afterwards in the drawing-room, where no doubt he told her what he had told Ericsen—that he did not think the effects of the fall would be permanent.

Marjorie called, attended by a servant, with a message for her cousin, and was received by Alice with cold politeness.

"Graham?" she said. "I will give him your message; he is quite invisible, as Lilian is fretful. I was going out to-night with him, but he wouldn't go, and I didn't care for it alone. Besides, he would have thought me too dreadful."

Marjorie listened gravely. She did not intend to give the impression that she thought Alice a martyr. She left her love, and went home, more heavy hearted than she had yet been over Graham's marriage.

Chapter 320

THE REAPER DEATH

LILIAN rallied, and in a few days seemed to be much her usual self. Dr. Hall was able to say more confidently that he thought no permanent effects of the shock would remain, but the child was to be kept quiet and not worried.

Alice made Lilian's recovery a ground for gentle raillery of Graham, and implied reproaches of his harshness.

The only person in the house who was not satisfied was Graham himself. As usual he made Marjorie his confidante.

"But Dr. Hall is satisfied," said the girl, trying to reassure him. "Are you not a little nervous?"

"I have tried to think so. Perhaps there is nothing as yet that a doctor can see—but I see it. The child isn't the same. I don't say the change is immediately caused by anything that may have happened"—for, of course, he had not told Marjorie about Alice. "I doubt—I always have doubted in my heart — our keeping her long."

The quietness, the hopeless assurance of manner and words held Marjorie mute.

The commonplaces of comfort, even could she have uttered them truthfully, would be simply cruelty and intrusion.

She watched Lilian whenever she had the opportunity, which was not often, for Alice's polite unpleasantness kept her away; but she could not trace any particular change in the child.

She could not help, nevertheless, sharing her cousin's fears.

She got a note from him one day, delivered by hand. She opened it with a sense of impending disaster—

"I wish you would come in as soon as you can. Lilian isn't at all well, and I have sent for Hall."

Marjorie was unavoidably detained till an hour or two later; then she hastily dressed, sent for a taxi, and drove to the Ericsens' house.

A distinct summons from her cousin made her reckless of Alice's airs.

She was not at all surprised to be met by Alice in the hall—the last place where she might be expected to be, in Marjorie's view, was at her sick child's bedside.

Alice smiled with a touch of raillery. "You will find Graham in the nursery," she said; "he would not be satisfied till Dr. Hall had been here."

"What does the doctor say?" asked Marjorie, not choosing to conceal her anxiety.

"Well, he says we must be careful. But you had better go up."

"Are you coming?"

"Oh, no—the poor child will be overwhelmed with three nurses."

Marjorie went upstairs smothering her indignation. She would get the real opinion from Graham.

His pleasure in seeing her, his warm but mute thanks to her for coming, were like balm on the laceration Alice had produced.

"I always like to have you when there's trouble about," he said, after she had kissed her little god-daughter and received a languid smile.

"Trouble, Graham?" Her heart sank.

"Dr. Hall don't say much — I can tell what he thinks," was the quiet answer.

"He is coming again. Can Aunt Cathie spare you, Marjorie?"

"To you? Yes, as long as you want me," said the girl earnestly.

She knew and felt as the day wore on what a comfort her presence was to him.

"I seem to have seen so little of you," he said once.

They were left to themselves—for Alice refused to believe in the danger that threatened the child, and declared that in any case she was never able to bear the sight of illness.

There seemed no imminent danger at first, but Lilian never had much strength to fall back on, and probably the doctor only spoke hopefully because he relied on the medical axiom that with children nothing is impossible.

But one day he changed his note — one day Graham, for all his outward stoicism, sought the doctor's face with dark eyes pathetic in their strained anxiety. He asked no questions save in that silent way—perhaps he already knew.

"I don't think we can do much," said the doctor gently. "I'll get another opinion, if you like."

Graham assented to this—he knew it was useless, but clung to the faint hope.

Another physician came and spent a long time in examining and questioning, with a secret wonder in his mind that the father knew more about the child than the mother did; that it lay in the father's arms, and cried when the mother would have taken it.

Neither doctor could say that the fall and shock were exactly responsible for the child's state — they

might have hastened the end, but that end would have come inevitably before long.

Marjorie understood the whole position when the doctors had gone, and her cousin called her to him.

"Will you do something for me?" he said.

"Anything you ask, Graham."

"I oughtn't to ask so much," he said, "but—will you tell Alice? I can't."

"You couldn't ask too much. I'll go at once."

It wasn't want of resolution, or fear of his self-command, she knew, that made him shrink from the task that was properly his—his fear was lest at this solemn time of suffering and death, he said too much.

And Alice confirmed the girl's conviction. She wouldn't at first believe that the child would die.

"Nonsense!" she said; "it's impossible!"

Then, when she was persuaded—"Dots Graham believe it? Why didn't he come and tell me himself? He's angry with me! He'll hate me!

"He thinks it's my fault! Why doesn't he leave that child and tell me it isn't my doing! Always Lilian—Lilian! and the world may go to pieces!"

Then she threw herself down in her wild way, sobbing and clutching the cushions convulsively. Was she breaking her heart for the child or for Graham's anger? Marjorie asked herself.

"I don't know anything about that," she said gently, "but I don't think he would feel so at such a time, whatever has happened. I'm sure he would be pleased if you would go and see the child."

"Oh, no! he wouldn't! You don't understand! I'm wretched—wretched!"

Marjorie went away; and presently Alice did [illegible] to the nursery, where Lilian, still in her father's arms, lay in a deepening lethargy.

She knelt by her husband's chair, watching him more than the child, leaning her head against his shoulder and angered that he seemed too absorbed in the little sufferer to respond to the caress.

She got up presently and said she would lie down. There never seemed to cross her the faintest idea that her place was here.

Graham showed no wish either for her to go or to stay.

He kissed her as she stooped her face to his, but his eyes went back to the child's face, though Alice lingered at his side.

"I'm no use, you see," she said to Marjorie, in apology for going, "and I can't do without my night's rest."

Perhaps the most wretched creature in the house that night was its mistress—seeking with sleepless brain and burning soul how to keep her one possession—her husband's love.

Early in the morning Lilian died.

A few minutes before the end Marjorie had whispered—"Shall I get Alice?" but Graham shook his head; and then, when he had given his last kiss and seen the last smile in the blue eyes—for she always knew him—he still sat, with the tiny form held close to his heart—sat as if he were turned to stone.

When Marjorie at last sought to take the child from him, he yielded at once, got up, and turned to leave the room.

The girl dared not say a word to him—he seemed out of her reach—even hers.

If there had been a tear, a moment's faltering, even a quiver of the lip, it would have been something; but how could she get at grief so overwhelming that it had neither word or sign?

Graham closed the nursery door gently, and without a second's pause went to Alice's room.

He was not in a state to analyze his motives—perhaps he obeyed some imperative craving when he went himself to tell her of the child's death.

The light was still not very clear, and the tall form coming up to the bedside looked dim and startled Alice, who had been asleep. She lefted herself with a blanching cheek.

"Graham—is that you?"

"Yes—who else?"

"You frightened me!" She was trembling as she sat up in the dawn and looked at him. "Do you want me?"

He said quietly — "I have come to tell you that Lilian is dead—" and he had no wonder at himself that he could say such words with perfect calmness.

He did not soften those words to her in any way —did not sit by her or take her hand.

Whether he felt dimly that she needed no consolation, or that his own strength had no foundation and would snap at a touch, he made no attempt at any tenderness at all.

But Alice thought he still held anger against her, and this thought excluded all others. She put out her quivering hands—

"Don't hate me!" she said in a strangled voice, and Graham sat down on the bed and drew her into his arms.

His craving had mastered his distrust, his just anger; he wanted to forgive, he wanted to be at peace.

But he could not read her heart.

"He is mine again—there is no one between us; he turns to me for love now that he has not hers. I know how to keep him," was in that heart.

And still she did not understand him—still made mistakes.

She was silent, not because she felt that words would be out of place, but because she did not know what to say; she wondered why, after a minute, he put her from her gently and got up.

"You had better try and sleep," he said. She drew a breath of relief, she had been afraid he would expect her to come and see Lilian.

But Graham had a curious double sense about his wife—he retained his real relations towards her under the emotion of the hour.

It was less a reconciliation than the, to him, impossibility of being just now at enmity with her.

"But don't go away," she said, taking his hand as he put her back on her pillows. "I shall sleep better if you are here."

He kissed her in a gentle sort of way, but did not answer, and left her. She lifted herself as the door closed.

"Has he gone to the child?" she said to herself. "If I dared I would go too!" She shuddered and threw herself back. "Well, it is only a little longer!"

And she lay there through the long hours, almost praying for, and yet half dreading, her husband's return.

Chapter 321

A DOSE OF CHLORAL.

ALICE chose becoming mourning, and she talked in measured and suiable terms to the friends and acquaintance who called. "How well she bears up!" these said. "Yet she was not able to go to the funeral. He went — of course, he had to. One wouldn't expect the mother to bear it. Besides. Earl's Monckton must have such painful memories for her, and the child was buried there. I was told he seemed quite unmoved."

From Earl's Monckton Ericsen went away by himself, to Alice's vexation.

She wrote to him every day, and expected replies in the same measure, and when, after a fortnight, he came home, met him with a joy untempered by the sorrow that had fallen on the house.

She thought, now the child was gone in bodily presence, that the empire was all her own.

She might have resumed some of it, simply from the man's need of home love, if her instincts had anything approached her capacity for passion; but she could not help showing her triumph in complete possession.

Ericsen recoiled from this—the temporary relations evaporated. He had nothing at home to fall back upon — the nursery was empty, and the whole house echoed that emptiness.

He sought more and more relief outside the house —in the society of Marjorie and her mother. After a few weeks he talked of moving.

"Why?" said Alice. "This house is charming—

just suits us."

"I'm sorry to put you out—you shall choose another house where you like," he said, shrinking from an explanation.

Alice did not need one, but she chose to gain her point, and persisted.

"It will put me out extremely," she said. "House-hunting is wear and tear."

"Aunt Cathie and I will do that, and you shall choose finally."

"Oh!" with a smile. "Aunt Cathie is the confidant, then?"

"It's not a matter for any particular confidence," said Ericsen carelessly.

"I suppose it came out in one of your frequent conversations with her," said Alice, in her double-edged way. "I'm sorry she encouraged you."

Then he said abruptly—"I can't stand the house any longer!"

And she, having got exasperated with her failure, said, with the touch of savagery that had escaped her before—"So you would put me aside for a memory!"

He simply went white as death, and then left the room.

He had his way, of course—it was scarcely a matter of choice. He should break down, he knew, if he stopped in the place much longer.

Aunt Cathie helped him to find a house, and he made Alice understand there was to be no captiousness about her approval.

She showed her teeth over this, but she knew her master, to whom she clung as a slave does—halfsubmissive, half-rebellious.

Before they had settled long Ericsen took a fancy to go to The Croft, the fact being that he was restless,

with all the heart gone out of him.

Alice objected.

"You may please yourself about going," said Ericsen good-humoredly.

"You know I can't bear the place."

"Isn't that a little morbid, Alice?"

"Is it more morbid than your hating the house I liked?" she flashed out bitterly.

"We needn't discuss that. If you like to come, I shall be pleased to take you."

"And if not, you'll leave me—alone! Is that why you are going?"

"I don't know," said Ericsen, who had suppressed his surprise and displeasure, "why there is all this fuss about a simple proposition, I can not understand. You are quite free to do as you please."

"I'm not," she broke in, "because I can't stand the place, and I can't bear you to leave me. You want to get away from me—I bore you! You want to get to Lilian—the very place where she lies is more precious than I am! She stands between us still!"

"An indictment then?" said Ericsen with pale, set lips.

He moved back from her, but he faced the conflict that had been brooding for weeks.

"Yes," she said passionately, "you are cold as ice to me! Why did you make me love you if you shrink from me now? You never loved me as I love you, and since Lilian died you have hated me—you think I killed her.

"But the whole world might die, and I wouldn't care so long as I had you! I am still here — I am not dead! Why should you break your heart over her?"

Even now, though Ericsen realized a sort of crisis, he was to a great extent tongue-tied.

He could not say to her face, "I have made a terrible mistake."

He could not say what he would scarcely acknowledge to himself—that her love for him was that of the mistress rather than the wife; and he could not drag into this quarrel even the name of his dead child as she had done.

"I have never hated you," he said. "I have striven to let wrongs sleep—they cannot be recalled, and you and I have to live our lives together. Such wild words only make things worse."

"Wrongs!" said Alice. "What wrongs? What could you do that I would not let sleep for ever for just one such kiss as you used to give? How could I love anything that took some love from me?"

"Lilian took nothing from you — nothing!" said Ericsen. His lip quivered irrespressibly at the unusual name.

"She is taking you from me now," cried Alice, with increased passion. "You have not forgiven me in your heart! You leave me whenever you can!

"You go to other people you say you love—they all take you from me! I have nothing—nothing—if I lose you! I thought I should be happy again—and I am most wretched!

"You love in measure!" she said in another tone — low, savage, and her long, slender hands clenched themselves till they quivered. Ericsen's eyes went to the movement with the sort of fascination trivialities have for us sometimes in moments of great tension. "I don't. I would sell my soul where you count the cost!"

He went up to her and took the clenched hands. He was conscious of a wish to stop that incessant movement, like a hand closing and closing on a victim.

"Now, listen to me," he said.

"Don't hold me, then!" she said sharply, "you hold me like a master!"

He simply tightened his clasp, and it surprised him to find how much strength he had to put out. But then she was in a kind of fury.

"I want you to understand I am master," he said quite quietly, but very few people, either men or women, would have cared to cross him then. "It is a master you need, though you thought to make a slave.

"Now, if I chose to carry on recriminations, I could answer your accusations, but I won't have scenes. Neither will I have you call me to account for my going and coming.

"Now, which are you going to choose—real peace or——"

"Or what?" she gasped, looking up with a sudden wild terror. Her hands lay slack in his.

"I see you understand me," he said, loosing his hold.

"No, I don't—you can't mean that! I should kill myself! I should kill myself! You didn't mean it! Oh, don't madden me so! Graham, answer me! You could not part, whatever I did! It would only be because I loved you!"

She was half-catching at a table near, and swayed as her fingers slipped from it helplessly.

Ericsen put her in a chair, and she dropped her face forward on his hand.

"You conquer me!" she whispered. "You always can! You make me hate you, and yet I must yield! And it kills me to hate you! Oh, don't go yet—be a little kind to me!"

"Be kinder to yourself. Your unfounded jealousies drive me further away and only injure yourself."

Continued in next number

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